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Exile in Sephardic Literature of Amsterdam

Harm den Boer[1]

Sephardic culture has long been (and indeed still is) surrounded by beautiful stories of Iberian Jewish loyalty, of keys anxiously guarded down the centuries, of hidden crypto-Jewish communities in remote regions, of people who still speak an archaic and beautiful medieval Spanish (Judeo-Español), of old women singing romances long forgotten in the peninsula. Even the Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, only remotely connected with the Expulsion of 1492, has its share of myth associated with it. Proudly called the 'New Jerusalem',[2] the Sephardic community of Amsterdam was a realm of Iberian Jewish greatness. Considered the most important Jewish congregation in the Western Diaspora, it produced many influential rabbis and a vibrant cultural life, manifest in the impressive synagogue building, still standing today, and in the many books in Spanish, Portuguese and Hebrew issued from its presses. Today visitors still come to the Portuguese synagogue expecting to hear Judeo-Español spoken and hoping to hear melancholic Iberian stories.

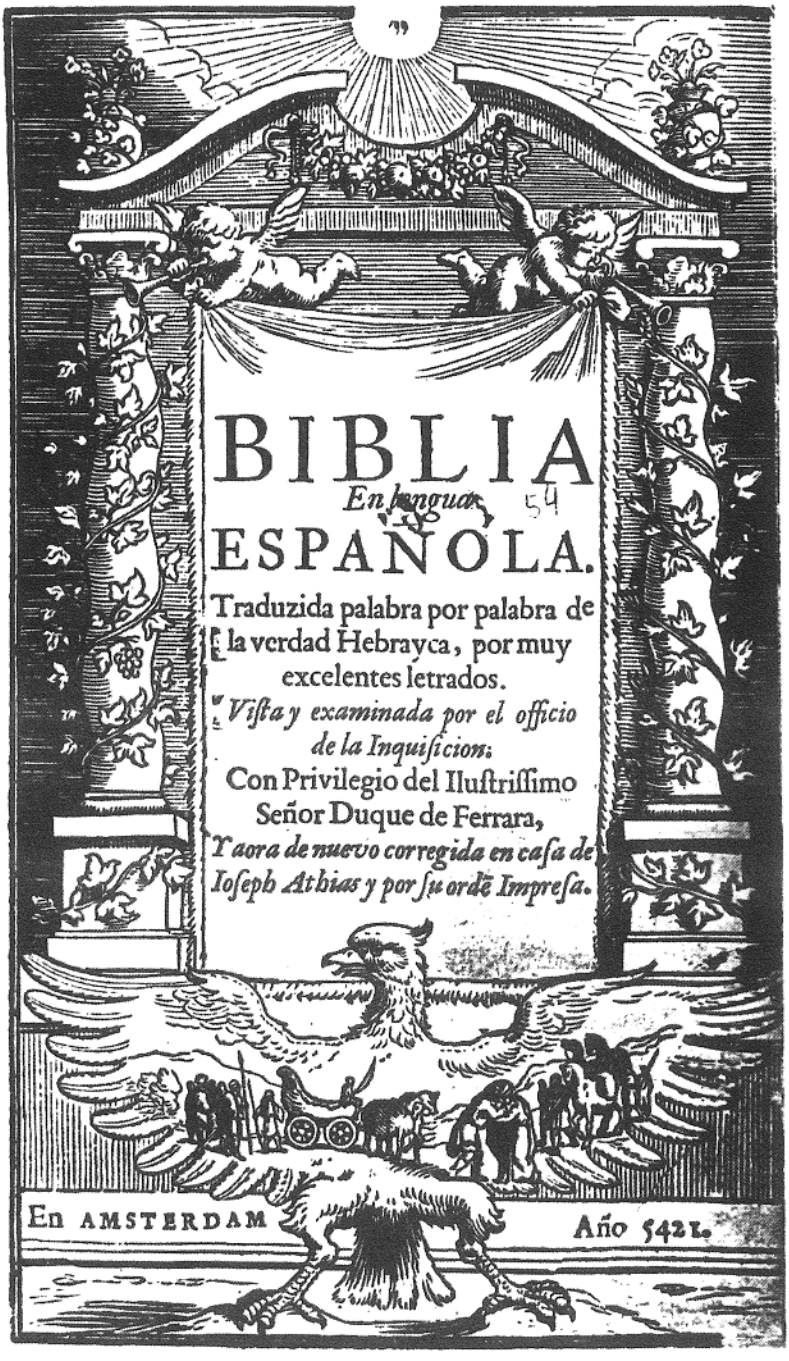
Traditionally, the Iberian culture of Sephardic Jews such as those of Amsterdam has been understood as an affected attachment to their native soil. The *conversos* who returned to Judaism in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century were portrayed as wandering souls, divided between their cultural, Iberian identity and their Jewish zeal.[3] Wherever Iberian Sephardic culture manifested itself, an irrepressible longing for the sweet past on the Iberian peninsula was heard, a melancholy that conflicted with the discipline imposed by the new Jewish identity. In this romantic view, the new Jews of Amsterdam were exiles, not immigrants, and their Iberian culture was, essentially, a culture of exile.

When I began to study the literature of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam, what struck me was the absence of the nostalgic, plaintive tone I associated with exile literature. Quite the contrary, their literature was rather confident in tone: it celebrated many aspects of religious and social life in the Dutch Republic. The theme of Roots and Uprootedness offered an opportunity to reexamine this

[1] I would like to thank my colleague Kenneth Brown for his critical reading of an earlier draft of this article.

[2] Although this characterisation is often found in studies on the Amsterdam Sephardim, I do not know when it was introduced, or to be more precise, whether it was adopted by the Sephardim themselves or invented by nineteenth-century historians.

[3] J.A. van Praag, 'Almas en litigio', in *Clavileño* 1, (1950), p. 14-27.



Spanish Bible printed by Joseph Athias in 1661, based upon the translation of the 'Hebrew Truth' first printed in Ferrara. On the titlepage, a representation of the exodus of the people of Israel under the wings of the eagle (Ex 19:4); (Private collection).

subject of exile within the somewhat broader and more theoretical framework provided by recent social and historical studies on the Portuguese community of Amsterdam, together with a leading essay on the theme of exile from a comparative literary perspective.[4]

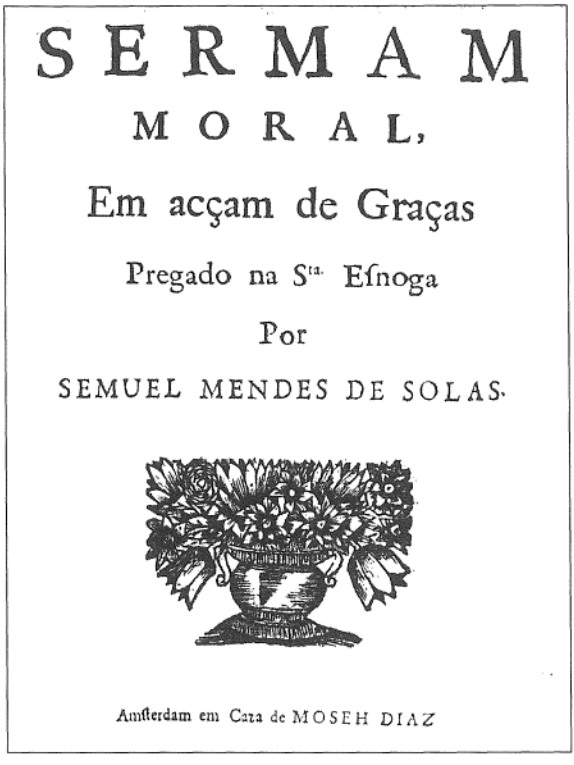
Exile as theme or experience

To approach the Sephardic literature of Amsterdam as exile literature, as a cultural mode or genre, it is important to reflect on the way in which personal or historical circumstances such as exile or migration relate to their supposed literary expression. Exile is rarely examined as a purely literary *topos*, in the same way a theme like love is dealt with, for instance. The latter tends to be studied without referring to the writer's life and ignoring the sometimes substantial biographical data available, in an affirmation of the autonomy of literature. The literature of exiles, on the other hand, is nearly always examined in relation to the social and biographical circumstances of the writer, and indeed, the latter frequently determines and conditions our reading: since we know about the experience of an uprooted writer, we read with the expectation of finding expressions of nostalgia, loss or whatever sentiment may be related to the experience of being outside one's natural environment. It is common practice to assume that exiled writers produce 'exile' literature, a principle that would raise certain eyebrows if it were applied to love. Do writers in love necessarily write only amorous literature?

This different, extra-literary approach to the theme of exile can, of course, be explained. Exile has an important public, even political dimension, which is not as easy to overlook as the personal, often private, circumstances that can befall an individual. Moreover, in literature exile is related to key issues of language and identity. Writers who express themselves in their native tongue within a foreign environment, imbue their texts with additional meaning, motivated by or addressed to their native culture. National or cultural identity and politics also play an important role, which explains the often partisan readership of literature when produced in exile: it is either totally ignored, or at best considered of 'marginal interest' compared to the 'national' literature. Or, alternatively, it is eagerly glossed for those critical expressions supposed to be censored in the home country. A text written in exile tends to be regarded *a priori* as an exile-text, and this often determines the way it is interpreted as much as the way it was written.[5]

4 C. Guillén, *Múltiples moradas. Ensayo de Literatura Comparada*, (Barcelona 1998).

5 An eloquent example of this phenomenon is the reception of the work of Max Aub, a Spanish exile. Until recently his work was hardly read or commented on by Spanish literary critics. It took someone as critical and heterodox as the novelist Juan Goytisolo to vindicate the work of this writer (J. Goytisolo, El País).


SERMAM
MORAL,
Em acçam de Graças
Pregado na Sta. Eſnoga
Por
SEMUEL MENDES DE SOLAS.
Amſterdam em Caza de MOSEH DIAZ

Portuguese sermon by Samuel Mendes de Solas thanking the Lord for having delivered his mother and brothers in peace, allowing them to reach Amsterdam when they fled inquisitorial Portugal; (Copy Ets Haim, Livraria Montezinos, Amsterdam).

In this case, however, the social dimension of exile is not enough to classify the texts produced as exile literature. The taxonomy of the latter is far more complex. It involves various peripheral and biographical circumstances, the presence of certain motifs and themes, and the pragmatic context of language, forms of publication, intended or empirical readership. For example, not every work written by an exiled Spanish Republican writer in Argentina or Mexico would be considered exile literature. Its readership could be generally Hispanic or at least, in theory, intended only for countrymen left behind. And what about what some critics have called the internal exiles: writers who remained in their countries but who felt that silence had been imposed on them?

The term exile is in itself problematic. Today, the word is rarely used in its strict sense, referring to the practice of 'vested authority of imposing a prolonged absence from one's country as a punitive measure'.[6] The extent of imposition and punishment seem to belong to the realm of the subjective, to perception as much as to objective sanction.

[6] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *s.v.* 'Exile'.

To view the situation of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of seventeenth century Amsterdam as one of uprooted exiles therefore presents certain problems.[7] The vast majority of Iberian immigrants who joined the Jewish congregations of cities like Amsterdam, London and Hamburg were voluntary migrants who were not forcibly removed from their native soil, like the Jews of the Babylonian Exile or the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. They migrated for a variety of reasons ranging across the blurred boundaries of the individual and the social, the religious and the economic;[8] just as blurred or even artificial are those drawn today between asylum seekers, economic refugees and global labour forces.

The different motives of Iberian *conversos* for leaving their native soil were highlighted in contemporary Sephardic literature.[9] An individual's sense of uprootedness was a function of their capacity to integrate into the new society, involving divergent factors such as skills and training, economic situation, personal experience (the presence or absence of persecution), class, age, gender or simply ways of thinking. Clearly, different circumstances, in combination with different temperaments, would lead to entirely opposing perceptions of life in a new environment. A second-generation Portuguese migrant with limited resources might feel more exiled than a once persecuted newcomer who enjoyed a thriving business in the new environment. The Sephardic community that existed as a distinct colony in Amsterdam until the close of the eighteenth century comprised migrants of all types, some who arrived with relative ease, some who had narrowly escaped the Inquisition, and others – soon the majority – who were born or raised in the Dutch Republic and so possessed only a vague notion of their Iberian origins.

Cultural identity is, however, a construction based as much upon perception as on direct experience, and in the collective self-image shaped by the Dutch Sephardim, their Iberian identity continued to accompany their rediscovered Jewish consciousness. As a community, the Sephardim saw themselves as Jews, Dutch and Iberians alike. Menasseh ben Israel referred to himself as *lusitano* – he was born in Portugal – and *hebreo*, whereas politically he identified himself with the Dutch (*ánimo batavo*). Miguel (Daniel Levi) de Barrios would saw himself as a Spaniard, as well as a subject of the Spanish crown, but was also able to identify himself with the Portuguese or the Dutch cause, and of course with the Jewish 'Nation'. Abraham Farrar described

7 I refer, of course, to the title 'Uprooted Roots: Amsterdam and the Sephardic Diaspora' and the following passage from the conference brochure: 'Finally, when migrating from one temporary homeland to the next becomes such an intricate part of the history of a people as in the case of the Jews, the very experience of frequent uprooting and wandering, of exile upon exile, may become part of its collective consciousness'.

8 M. Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, (Bloomington, Indianapolis 1997).

9 E.g., the often quoted passage from Isaac Orobio de Castro on the different degrees of religious sincerity among the Sephardic immigrants.

himself as *judeo do desterro de Portugal*. All of these individuals continued to express themselves in their native tongues (Spanish and/or Portuguese), and all of them, to some extent, kept in touch with Iberian music, theatre and literature, a habit that would be perpetuated among second and third generation immigrants.

The Iberian origins and culture of these Jews served as a beacon amid the fluctuations and the uncertainties with which they were confronted, both as immigrants or strangers in a new environment, and as Jews without a Jewish tradition. It also reminded them, however, of hardships, persecution and exclusion. How, then, did the narrative of persecution presents itself in Sephardic collective memory, and how was the theme of exile treated?

Exile in converso literature

In literature, the attitudes most commonly associated with exile are epitomised in Ovid, whose acute awareness of banishment as a loss, in its geographical, personal and existential sense, was a model for imitation. The writer of *Tristia* perceived his exile as a life on the periphery, the *orbus ultimus*, among strangers ('barbarians'): an existential void. He attempted to overcome this void by addressing letters to the friends he had left behind in the imperial capital, in poems in which he lamented his present situation while remembering his happy past.

In the Renaissance, with the revival of interest in biography, the theme of exile became a popular subject, reflecting the renewed popularity of classical poets like Ovid, but especially the incipient nationalisation of culture. The birth of early-modern states at the close of the fifteenth century, with their claims of territorial unity, combined with an increasing need for unity of religious confession (*huius regio, cuius religio*) was to produce the phenomenon of mass exile. The Spanish and Portuguese Jews represented the first major group of exiles in early modern Europe: for the Spanish Jews, the reason was their expulsion from Spain in 1492; for the Portuguese Jews, the reason was their forced conversion in 1497, followed by the introduction of the Inquisition in 1547.

The dramatic fate of Iberian Jewry has led to huge speculation about its cultural impact. According to scholars such as Américo Castro and Marcel Bataillon, the masterpieces of the Iberian literature of the early modern period can only be properly understood when related to the fate of the *conversos*.[10] The existential drama present in prose works like *La Celestina* and *Lazarillo de Tormes* or in the Spanish Golden Age theatre reflected the impact of the *converso* problem in Spanish society.

Here, rather than dwell on that aspect, it is perhaps more appropriate to focus on the specifically 'elegiac' sensibility present in the works of some Spanish and Portu-

[10] M. Bataillon, '¿Melancolía Renascentista o Melancolía Judía?', in *Vara Lección de Clásicos Españoles*, (Madrid 1964).

guese *conversos* who abandoned their native soil, seeking some form of exile. The work of these sixteenth-century Iberian authors is replete with sentiments of loss, wandering and profound sadness. They include Alonso Núñez de Reinoso, whose poetry, together with his Byzantine novel *Los amores de Clareo y Florisea* (1552), has been defined by C.H. Rose as the work of an exile,[11] Bernardim de Ribeiro (1480/1500 – 1530-1545), the author of *Menina e Moça* (1554), a prose work universally recognised as an expression *par excellence* of the theme of exile and nostalgia, and finally Samuel Usque, who approached exile and persecution from a Jewish perspective in his *Consolação às tribulações de Israel.* Each of these three authors, identified as Iberian *conversos*, dealt with their hardships in a different way, but in Marcel Bataillon's view their works share a common sentiment, which he has characterised as 'Jewish melancholy.'

Consolação is especially relevant in the present context, because it effectively shaped the perception of exile felt by the Sephardim of the Western Diaspora, including Amsterdam. The 'Consolation for the tribulations of Israel', a chronicle of the plagues that had befallen the Jewish people, is a highly complex work, essentially because of its hybrid nature. As a chronicle or history of the Jewish people, or as a doctrinal work in which biblical prophecies serve as a consolation for the Jews, it may be categorised as non-fiction, but it is also fictional since the work is couched in the form of humanistic dialogues, while its setting and *overture* place it in the pastoral genre. In a detailed study, H.P. Salomon has concluded that the *Consolação* is a hybrid form on many levels, precisely because its author was struggling to reconcile the experience of a politic-cultural collective, the Portuguese, with an ethno-religious one, the Jews. Usque tried to give the sufferings of a specific group, the 'Portuguese Nation', a meaning within the broader framework of Jewish history, but continued to be emotionally and culturally attached to his Portuguese background. He wrote in Portuguese, his native tongue,[12] and his *Consolação* was addressed to the 'gentlemen of the Portuguese exile' rather than to a general Jewish audience.

Although he only partially succeeded, what Usque attempted to do was to universalise the fate of the Portuguese New Christians, to make them part of general Jewish history, and to offer the consolation promised by God to the Chosen People. Thus, this work, which shares the profound sense of sadness and melancholy with *Menina e moça*, presents a shift from loss and nostalgia to consolation, linked to a shift from national or political identity towards religious identity. The complexity and changes present in Usque's *Consolação* thus reflect the complex identity of Portuguese New Christians, with its double, shifting boundaries of ethnicity and religion. The work by Usque had a profound impact on the Western Sephardic or ex-*converso* Diaspora. In the Netherlands, this is corroborated by its early reappearance as one

[11] C.H. Rose, *Alonso Núñez de Reinoso: the Lament of a Sixteenth-Century Exile*, (Rutherford 1971).

[12] H.P. Salomon, 'Samuel Usque et les problèmes de la Consolação às tribulações de Israel', in *Deux études portugaises. Two Portuguese Studies*, (Braga 1991) p. 31.

of the first editions printed for the Portuguese Jewish community of that city. I consider the *Consolação* a paradigm of the 'New Jewish' response to exile.

Exile in Amsterdam Sephardic literature

The *saudade* so predominantly present in sixteenth-century Iberian literature, is rarely evident in the rich literary production of the Portuguese of Amsterdam. Spanish and Portuguese literature of the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam in the seventeenth century has a conspicuous absence of expressions of nostalgia, of melancholy, of loss. Overall, the poetry, drama and fictional prose transmit a confident and optimistic, rather than a grievous or melancholic tone.

This absence of exilic sentiment has an reason. In effect, the Sephardim of Amsterdam adopted the Usque model of dealing with their uprootedness. Having decided to leave Spain or Portugal behind and to embrace Judaism, and having been accepted into the Jewish community, they were expected to enjoy their new condition, but also to turn their back on their Iberian past.

From a Jewish point of view, life in Spain or Portugal was identified with captivity and sin. The idea of captivity was not a real experience for the majority of the New Christians living in seventeenth-century Spain and Portugal, since they were not really prevented from emigrating. Those who remained in the 'lands of idolatry', as the peninsula was often termed in Jewish discourse, were therefore living in sin.[13] Normally this sin was narrowed down to that of preferring to enjoy the material pleasures of life than to fulfilling the spiritual needs by moving to countries where Judaism could be openly practised. A conscious admission of religious sin was too much to ask from those former Christians, born and educated in ignorance of Judaism.

In an essay on the Iberian memory of the Sephardic Jews of Amsterdam, Daniel Swetschinski describes their state of collective amnesia. In their new existence as observant Jews, the obscure crypto-Jewish or simply Catholic past was a sin, and returning in memory or imagination to the native soil was the equivalent to the physical return to the 'lands of Idolatry'.[14] Expressions of nostalgia or loss for the country left behind, however sincerely felt, were difficult to express in this context. From this collective, ethno-religious perspective, their arrival in the Dutch Republic was perceived not as exile but as a new and happy exodus. The new Jews of Amsterdam adopted Usque's view that it was the Inquisition which had forced them to

[13] Y. Kaplan, 'The Travels of Portuguese Jews from Amsterdam to the Lands of Idolatry (1644-1724)', in Y. Kaplan (ed.), *Jews and Conversos: Studies in Society and the Inquisition*, (Jerusalem 1985), p. 197-215.

[14] D.M. Swetschinski, 'Un refus de mémoire. Les Juifs portugais d'Amsterdam et leur passé marrane', in E. Benbassa (ed.), *Mémoires juives d'Espagne et du Portugal*, (Paris 1996) p. 69-77.

leave Spain or Portugal. Therefore, they should be grateful to God for having sent the Inquisition as a divine instrument to awaken their conscience.

Spain and Portugal were identified as realms of idolatry, but rather than emphasise the religious aspect, namely the conflict of Catholicism and Judaism, the accent was placed on the material aspects. Thus the exodus was a move from material to spiritual well-being, as can be read time and again. Immanuel Aboab referred to Spain and Portugal as 'the ocean of [...] immense idolatry and error' from which *conversos* could escape to take refuge in the 'safe haven'. Not choosing to do so was tantamount to excessive greed.[15]

Abraham Farrar was one of many who identified the Iberian past with captivity in Egypt, he regarded the Inquisition as an instrument sent by God to provoke the return of his people. In exhorting his fellow countrymen to leave, he did not refer to the problem of religion, but recalled the material aspects of idolatry: 'Throw away the idols of silver and gold, and also those of interest and worldly riches, which are the chains that bind us'.[16] Abraham Idaña cited of the 'vanities of the world and the conveniences' as the reasons preventing those of his nation from leaving Spain and Portugal.[17]

Since the dark forces of the Inquisition governed Spain and Portugal,[18] returning to Judaism in countries where this was permitted was regarded as deliverance. So rather than being an exile, emigration was regarded as a felicitous exodus; Exile was living in Spain or Portugal. Many Sephardic texts refer to the escape from the Inquisition and captivity. This motif is also found in Sephardic iconography, such as the titlepage of the Spanish Bible printed by Joseph Athias in Amsterdam in 1661, where the exodus of the people of Israel is depicted under the wings of an eagle. A particularly powerful use of the exodus-myth is found in some sermons delivered by new members of the Sephardic community who had managed to escape persecution. In what may be considered a sub-genre of Sephardic preaching, the 'sermons of gratitude', pupils of the rabbinical academy of Ets Haim celebrated their return to Judaism. The delivery of their sermons was celebrated as a special occasion; their homilies were issued in print and accompanied by hyperbolic praises.

[15] See C. Roth, 'Immanuel Abwab's proselytization of the Marinas from an unpublished letter', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, EX, 2 (1932), p. 145, quoted in H. Méchoulan, *Hispanidad y judaísmo en tiempos de Spinoza: Estudio y edición de 'La certeza del camino' de Abraham Pereyra Amsterdam 1666*, (Salamanca 1987), p. 39.

[16] *Pelloque nos que samos* [sic] *seus desçendentes aprendamos a fazer como elle: tiremos os idolos da prata e do ouro e não só éstes, mas tambem os do intereçe e riqueza mundana, que são grilhons que nos atão por cujo respeito muitas vezes deixamos a Deos. Os que deste povo estão derramados por França, e outras partes fora do serviço do Senhor, recolhãose ao grémio do Judesmo, aonde possão çircumçidarse e observar as encomendannças da Ley* (p. 10).

[17] B. Teensma, 'Fragmenten uit het Amsterdamse convoluut van Abraham Idaña alias Gaspar Méndez del Arroyo (1623-1690)', *StRos* 31, (1977) p. 135.

[18] The responsibility of the monarchy or of kings was generally ignored. The Black Legend representations of the Spanish kings (Philip II) in Protestant anti-Spanish propaganda are not found in Sephardic literature.

The real-life experience of exile (from Spain or Portugal) was reinterpreted as the exile of the people of Israel. It substituted the *saudade* of the lost fatherland with a Jewish *saudade*, a longing for Jerusalem. It also gave a sense to the collective suffering of the *conversos* as they merged their particular fate with the history of Israel, in much the same vein as Usque did in his *Consolação*. Thus, the *converso* melancholy of Exile was instrumentalised as Jewish melancholy, and in this sense Sephardic literature can be seen as Exile literature, yet of a doctrinal, not a personal kind.

The Plutarchean answer to Exile

In his comparative study on exile in literature, Claudio Guillén mentions another basic reaction to the experience of exile besides the Ovidian response, one far less commented upon. This is the reaction of acceptance, recognising the universal value of exile as part of human condition; its classical model can be found in the writings of Plutarch. In addition to the more general form of resignation or acceptance in the transformation of the individual Iberian experience into a shared Jewish history, other, more specific forms of a universalizing response to exile and marginalisation also exist.

The need to find common values, to transcend individual suffering is a feature of Sephardic literature, although unlike Ovidian or 'Jewish' melancholy it is rarely mentioned. In this respect the work of Miguel (Daniel Levi) de Barrios (1635-1701) is revealing. Barrios has often been quoted as an example of the *saudade* or *nostalgia* felt by former *conversos* for the Iberian past. In his *Coro de las musas* (1672) the poet inserts a personal note in his lyrical description of the Kingdom of Spain when he evokes his native Montilla: 'Hail to thee, Montilla, my progenitor, and heel to thee, O Spain, for the lion snatches me away from thee by force.' It has also been noted that in one of his esoteric, cabbalistic texts he placed the Garden of Eden in Spain.[19] Indeed, in other verses he complained to fellow Spaniards about the hardships he, the poetic genius so celebrated by his Iberian audience, had to endure among his own coreligionists. All these are examples of the Lost Paradise theme, of Ovidian exile.

This is an undeniable trait of Barrios's work, but it is not the sole motif, nor the predominant one. In fact this was the author of some particularly enthusiastic verses about the city of Amsterdam, praising it for its freedom, tolerance and opulence, moreover, while he placed the biblical Garden of Eden in Spain, he situated the act of Creation in the Low Countries! Barrios was a mixed-up spirit, a person who exemplifies the contradictory experience of Sephardic exile. But throughout his whole work, time and again he clearly attempts to reconcile his secular and religious identity, to harmonise a world – like his own – splintered by wars, conflicting religions and oppressed minorities. Barrios considered his poem *Imperio de Dios en la*

[19] Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

armonía del mundo his *magnum opus*, and this work is a huge, if extremely obscure and confused effort to reconcile religions, countries at war (France, the Dutch Republic, Portugal, Spain, the Ottoman Empire) and peoples, all under the leadership of a Sabbatian Messiah who would soon come to deliver Jews and Christians alike.

The universalist response to his own situation is not unique among the Sephardic Jews of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Rabbis like Menasseh ben Israel, in his *Conciliador* (1632-1651), or Judah Leao Templo with his temple project, tried to communicate with the Christians with whom they were in dialogue. Their work appears to reveal a similar preoccupation with common, shared values as a powerful answer to the marginalisation of exile. Even in the religious polemics that Sephardic Jews carried on with Christian opponents there is a wish to overcome the divisions caused by prejudice, oppression or aggression. Abraham Gómez Silveira attacks and ridicules his fictitious Catholic, Protestant and Muslim opponents in his *Diálogos theológicos jocoserios*, but he also expresses a desire for mutual communication and for religious tolerance.[20]

The value of these responses by Barrios, Menasseh ben Israel and Gómez Silveira is not in shared religious values – in that respect they preferred the Usque narrative of biblical exodus and exile – but rather in their answer to the social divide that lay at the root of their departure from Spain and Portugal, one they wanted at all costs to overcome. In this sense, the secular dimension of Sephardic literature may be regarded as a form exile literature in the Plutarchean sense.[21]

Concealed laments

These Sephardic texts reflect one of the characteristics of literature, that of formulating an answer to intensely experienced conflicts, transcending human limitations, through the consolation of religion, politics or beauty. However, it is a form of comfort that hides the unpleasantness of real life. Naturally, the Iberian immigrants (or exiles) must have felt a sense of loss, melancholy and frustration. The actual examples of individuals who challenged Jewish authority in Amsterdam, such as Da Costa and Spinoza, or those who travelled or even returned to Spain or Portugal despite the evident danger are proof that not everything could be resolved through ideology or aesthetic discourse.

Although rare, some texts offer a glimpse of what people really felt. A poignant example is found in a report sent by two Sephardic pioneers who explored the commercial possibilities of settlement in the New World. The territory they looked at (Wilde Kust, Surinam) aroused their enthusiasm for its promises of abundance and

[20] K. Brown and H. den Boer, *El barroco sefardí. Abraham Gómez Silveira*, (Kassel 2000) p. 45-50.

[21] H. den Boer, *La literatura sefardí de Amsterdam*, Alcalá de Henares: Instituto de Estudios Sefardíes y Andalusíes, (1996).

fertility, and is conveyed in a tone that recalls the euphoria of Columbus's early exploits:

> There is also a large plantation of sugar cane, which they tell us is famous, there are many javelins the Indians kill in exchange for a knife, and wild chicken – not so many tame ones, but there are plenty of small creatures. The Indians and the whites make some beverages of sweet potatoes and mandioca which are very refreshing and better than beer [...] and above all much land [...] where men die of old age because of the healthy and fresh winds.[22]

After evoking an almost paradisiacal picture, the men address themselves to their fellow Jews, left behind in Amsterdam. They try to persuade them to settle in the New World. With a sudden burst of sincerity, they add how thankful they are to the Lord for having liberated them, the travellers, from that northern 'hell of snow' and brought them in peace to these tropical lands![23] Amsterdam, the celebrated New Jerusalem reveals itself here as the harsh place it must have seemed to any sensitive Mediterranean spirit.

Another example of these hidden, private emotions of displacement can be found in the *miscellanea* collected by Isaac de Matitiyah Abwab. Among the many works this retired merchant had copied or written, most of them doctrinal, moral or religious treatises, he possessed a collection of songs, plays and poetry from the private, domestic realm. These include a curious composition: a dialogue between to Sephardic women, Rica and Sara. An extraordinary feature of this verse is the colloquial, domestic Portuguese employed by the two characters, a dialectal variation which reveals an affected attachment to the native tongue. The two women comment upon everyday matters within the Portuguese community; they gossip about the behaviour of its leaders, offering an extraordinary perspective on Jewish life in Amsterdam. It offer a glance inside to surpass that of any other text. As their conversation becomes more intimate, Rica complains about her age, her lost beauty, suddenly Sara's changed world is revealed. She speaks out against what was never otherwise referred to in the immigration story of the Sephardic community:

> Na minha terra, mana, aonde havia
> em casa de meu pai muita largueza,
> que não metia a mão em água fria
> entonces gozava eu de gentileza

22 *Tambem ay muita cana plantada que nos certificarão hé famosa, ay muitos porcos monteses que os indios matão e vendem por uma faca, como galinhas do mato. Das cazeiras, poucas; mas ay diversas criacões. Os índios e brancos fazem alguas bebidas de batatas e mandioca fresquisimas e milhor que bira, e se é sorte e se descudão faz tomar a Gata. Sobre tudo terras muitas. adias que despido e suado que seando de dia e de noite nao faz mal, eos homens de velhos se an de morrer pelos ventos serem tao bellos e frescos*; Joshua Nunes Netto and Joseph Pereira, (*Copia da relação que da Barra de Pauroma em Wilde Kust mandão /-/*). (*Amsterdam*), *n. pr.*, (*c.* 1658), f. 2r. Municipal Archive, Amsterdam.

23 *E assim fiamos no Señor Bendito com a vista dellas mandaremos alguas cópias desta acrecentada com o mais que deles alcancaremos com toda a verdade e desengano sem nos apartar do que pervista e evidencia acharmos, e so por estas notícias tao boas diremos que sempre daremos gracas a Deos de nos haver tirado de esse inferno de neve, e nos trouxe em paz a estas terras*; ibid.

mas agora cansada
servindo na cozinha de criada.[24]

Only the company of her friend Rica and the pleasure of gossip can dispel Sara's *saudade*. In this short text, probably a sketch performed on Purim, female characters (a silenced voice in Sephardic communal life) represent the human experience behind the façade of their deliverance in New Jerusalem.

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[24] 'Back home, sister, in my father's house, there was much comfort, I never had to put my hand in cold water; then, I enjoyed luxury; now, I am tired, serving as a kitchen-maid.' The text is included in K. Brown, 'La poetisa es la una que con las de Apolo viene: nuevos datos y textos de varias poetisas sefardíes de los siglos XVII y XVIII', in M. Bosse et al. (eds), *La creatividad femenina en el mundo barroco hispánico*, (Kassel 1999), p. 160-167; vol. II p. 439-480.